

Steven Beatty
NJEA Secretary-Treasurer
Testimony before the State Board of Education on PARCC
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Good afternoon. My name is Steve Beatty. I am a social studies teacher from Bridgewater-Raritan and secretary-treasurer of New Jersey Education Association.

As you know, NJEA collaborated with the Department of Education to design, host, and facilitate four community meetings of interested stakeholders earlier this year to get a broad range of perspectives on PARCC and its effectiveness. I, even, took part in the one in Morristown as both a parent and educator. Following those sessions, stakeholders collaboratively reviewed, analyzed, and processed all of the data from these meetings. The findings are very telling and have helped shape the current proposals to modify the regulations guiding PARCC testing. Among our greatest concerns was that PARCC puts additional roadblocks on many students' paths toward success and growth.

For example, PARCC is written with extreme linguistic complexity. Our English Language Learners (ELLs) have the greatest likelihood of success when they reach English proficiency level of 5 (according to the ACCESS assessment), which takes multiple years to achieve. For testing to be more appropriate for this population, we must allow for more appropriate accommodations (digital bilingual dictionaries, glossaries, more visuals, simplified directions, additional time, read-aloud directions, etc.), and provide an assessment in student's native language. In my own classroom, I have seen ELL students who are quite capable in their native language, struggle in English. How can we expect them to take this test without appropriate accommodations, knowing it will harm them?

We commend the DOE proposal that would allow English Language Learners in their 1st year in the US be allowed to take ACCESS for ELLs instead of PARCC. This is a move in the right direction. However, we must urge for greater allowances for our newcomers and ELLs as they navigate a new culture, language acquisition, etc.

In another example, we have found significant concern for our Special Education population and students with 504 plans. In many cases, the statewide assessment system currently drives the writing of student IEP accommodations for testing, based on what is available within the PARCC system. The accommodations that Special Education and students with 504 plans receive throughout the school year may not be available to students during PARCC testing. There is an obvious disconnect when we have a legally binding obligation to provide accommodations but come test time, those accommodations cannot be met. We need to have accommodations that align with the needs of our students. With regards to the DOE's proposal, we should clarify that a student's IEP or 504 plan should establish the individualized accommodations, instructional adaptations, and/or modifications that must be provided and is an improvement to the current regulations.

We must implement an assessment system that serves and supports all students – including our special education students and English Language Learners. We need to work together to ensure that appropriate accommodations, not just easily programmable accommodations, are produced for our students in need.

NJEA is pleased to see the Department taking the first steps toward a stronger and fairer assessment system with these proposed changes. However, if the Governor, Commissioner, Department of

Education, and State Board are serious about strengthening the educational experiences of New Jersey students, families, and educators, we have much more work to do.

We look forward to continued discussion and collaboration with the Department as we venture into Phase II of the Assessment Outreach work.

On behalf of the 200,000 NJEA members that are currently in our schools building foundations for the rest of the year with our students, I want to thank you for taking these valuable steps to recognize that parents and children want these changes as much as we do.

Thank you.